Solar Legislation

From: Scott R. Simpson <srs@co.halifax.va.us>
Sent: Tue, Jan 28, 2020 at 12:27 pm
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Wayne, Dan, Susan, Rebecca, Charlette; Board Members, and Staff.

As you are aware, utility scale Solar Facilities are growing in number and size. The Legislatively mandated 80% tax exemption is a huge incentive to the developers to continue to develop projects and to advance the Governor's and State's initiative for clean green energy. However, this exemption is effectively funded by the localities, and the 20% taxable value provided is not sufficient to offset the current, future, and unknown impacts of the large scale facilities.

The 80% exemption also is not evenhanded to localities as these projects tie-up thousands of acres of land from future development and other uses where jobs and additional revenues will suffer in the coming decades.

Rural Southside Virginia is effectively exporting our natural resource (sunlight, converted to electrons) for the gains in other parts of Virginia who are receiving the jobs, and billions of investment and tax revenues from the large players buying this renewable energy. By tying up our Southside land for 35+ years we will be losing 2 cycles of timber growth and harvesting, 35 years of crops, livestock, and natural beauty for the offset of a miniscule 20% tax revenue of a rapidly depreciating asset which still produces over 90% of peak electricity in year 35. As Counties and Administrators, it is difficult for us to make long term budgeting decisions based upon a declining revenue stream.

Over the past 9 months, several Counties, VACO, VML, and solar developers met regularly in order to find common ground to increase revenues to the localities and this has resulted in at least 3 proposed bills as well as other independent legislation to aid in correcting this lopsided incentive. The Solar industry is willing to more than double the current revenues, but we need legislation to dictate that basis.

In order to ensure our interests are kept at the table, I have been asked by my Board to engage a lobbyist to advise and provide updates to us on a regular basis as well as lobby on our behalf for increased land use control and revenues.. While holding these discussions with potential lobbying firms, it became quickly evident that strength is in numbers as well as dollars. The costs to engage a firm for these services are

expected to be in the 20k – 30k range, thus an amount that not a single county could effectively afford alone.

Therefore, I write today to gage interest in an informal group I am preliminarily calling "Southside Solar Solutions", which with a commitment of no more than $5,000 each we could make this happen and engage a firm to help protect our interests.

Returning the incentive ability to the localities is one way to correct this lopsided incentive, as are other proposed methods to increase and level the revenues for these projects.
I/we as a group can circulate the status of legislation once we garner support for the group effort.

I realize this is short notice and the Assembly has already begun, however, from our summers long discussions I felt there was a strong agreement on a basic structure with the Developers however at the Assembly level there appear to be unexpected bumps and opposition for various reasons requiring this effort to protect our interests..

Thank you,
Scott

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